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SUBJECT: BRITISH COLUMBIA HOLDS CONFERENCE ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

11. Summary: The BC Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons (OCTIP) held its first ever conference bringing together law enforcement, NGOs, academics, government and political representatives to share ideas and best practices on addressing human trafficking. DPO and representatives of the Consulate Vancouver ICE office participated in workshops looking at issues from trafficking for sexual exploitation to labor trafficking, domestic trafficking, research and data collection and the difficulties of prosecution. Most participants agreed that Canada now has adequate legislation to address trafficking issues. The big problems lie in cooperation between police, NGOs and local government and the implementation of the legislation in legal enforcement and victims' assistance. End Summary

12. NGOs at the conference pushed hard on better treatment for trafficking victims. It still remains the case that many victims, especially in the sex trade, are treated as criminals initially by police. This causes them to be uncooperative and leads to missed opportunities for testimony against the traffickers. Training has become key to overcoming this problem. Organizations such as Servants Anonymous Society, have begun regular sessions with local police and prosecutors to help them learn to identify the signs of human trafficking and to develop skills to work with victims and develop trust. Delegates at the conference also looked at ways existing human rights legislation can assist in better protecting trafficking victims in Canada. Christina Harrison-Baird, from Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking (PACT) noted that the law is most effective when it promotes in victims a sense of security and safety. She stated that many international agreements have very permissive language allowing for "outs" for signatory countries. Still the international agreements are tools that can and should be used to push for government action.

13. An ICE official from the U.S. Consulate in Vancouver, along with Seattle-based U.S. Attorney Ye-Ting Woo and representatives from the Washington State NGO WARN, discussed cross-border cooperation in trafficking cases. The ICE official described several successful cases that highlighted the good cooperation between U.S. and Canadian law enforcement on TIP. The WARN representative discussed the importance of cooperation between the law enforcement and NGO community and the successes Washington State has had because they developed these all important relationships.

14. In a key workshop entitled "The Elusive P - Prosecution," participants discussed the dearth of convictions under the 2004 Canadian trafficking legislation. BC is considered a major transit area for TIP. Law enforcement and judicial officials emphasized that because it's a transit area, it is difficult to prosecute traffickers on anything more than human smuggling; the actions that move the crimes into the TIP category (coercion, imprisonment, abuse, etc) have often not yet occurred at the time the trafficking is detected. Prosecutors are left with no choice but to go with lesser charges because the victims don't realize what is ahead, even if the criminals are known to engage in trafficking. They also noted that trafficking laws are, relatively speaking, new for Canadian law enforcement and police and prosecutors are still learning how to craft cases that will meet the standards of the legislation.

15. Comment: The conference marked a giant leap forward for

anti-trafficking action in British Columbia. Last year BC became the first province in Canada to open its own TIP office. Since then the organization has made huge strides in reaching out to enforcement and assistance groups to develop a comprehensive and cooperative approach on trafficking issues. BC historically has had a huge gap between law enforcement and prosecution on one side, and the NGOs working with the victims on the other. We are starting to see this gap close. The presence of so many NGOs and victims' assistance groups, as well as trafficking victims themselves, at the conference showcased the success OCTIP has had in bridging this gap and moving BC toward effective actions in combating trafficking.

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